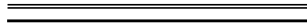
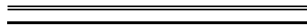


**The Bill Blackwood
Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas**



Retention in Law Enforcement



**A Leadership White Paper
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
Required for Graduation from the
Leadership Command College**



**By
Bryan Nodine**

**Decatur Police Department
Decatur, Texas
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ABSTRACT

The main topic of this research paper is the rising retention problem in police organizations today. Retaining qualified officers is a growing problem for law enforcement in America today. Along with many other issues, departments are struggling to retain qualified law enforcement officers because of low morale, lack of pay and benefits, little or no training, poor equipment, and no or slow advancement opportunities. Patrol officers are the backbone and labor force of any police organization. Retaining officers not only benefits departments by having a full force of knowledgeable officers to serve the community, but by also saving budget money that would have to be spent recruiting and training a new officer. Information obtained to support this paper came from internet articles, books, and handouts. Hiring officers to replace the ones leaving causes strain on existing officers within the department. In conclusion it was determined that to help alleviate the retention problem, agencies have looked into mentoring programs, offering incentives such as a housing allowance. One can say the old cliché of praise in public and discipline in private goes a long way, but it seems this itself has been changed to discipline in public and praise in private. Law enforcement leaders must look toward the future and ways of retaining their officers.

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INTRODUCTION

Retaining qualified officers has become a growing problem for law enforcement in America. There are many reasons for low retention rates within departments and these rates can vary from department to department. Retaining experienced officers not only serves the community by providing a full force of experienced officers capable of protecting citizens but also benefits departments by saving valuable resources such as time and money. Orrick (2008) stated that “to project a conservative estimate of an agency’s financial investment in an employee... administrators should consider the costs of the incumbent officer leaving, as well as expenditures for new employee recruitment, selection, hiring, and training” (p. 149). The overall cost of losing a valued employee and the process of hiring a new employee can be astronomical for departments. Orrick (2008) stated that “the rule of thumb for estimating the cost of losing a qualified employee ranges from one to five times the employees total salary” (p. 149). Many studies have shown that the highest ranked reasons for low retention rates include salaries and benefits, no or slow advancement, and low morale throughout the department. With the rise in low retention rates each individual department should examine how retention is impacting their agency and find a solution to keep all levels of officers, from patrol officers all the way up through the ranks.

POSITION

As stated in this research paper, there are many reasons police departments are losing officers. One of the most prominent reasons for personnel loss is that of salaries and benefits. Departments are losing officers to other agencies that are offering better compensation packages such as higher salaries, bonuses, or even better benefits.

Officers are commonly recruited by agencies with an enticing starting salary or sign on bonus; only to discover later in employment that pay increases usually turn out to be miniscule or non-existent. Yearwood (2003) observed that “on the average officers are leaving the department after two years and ten months which could possibly be due to failure to increase by promotion or merit increase” (p. 2). Another crucial component in compensation packages for officers is that of benefits. Benefits such as medical and life insurance are getting more expensive and the agencies are passing the cost down to their employees, and in some departments where raises are not being allocated to employees this could be viewed as a decrease in pay. Excellent benefits will help sway an officer in their decision between their current department and a new agency offering the same salary.

The recent changes in the economy have forced some officers to look for higher paying jobs outside of law enforcement and even overseas in order to provide for themselves and their families. Hoover (2008) showed the quantifiable difference between the public and private sector with data showing. Hoover (2008) stated “the public sector kept a lid on wages and benefits more effectively than the private sector... the cost per hour worked in the private sector rose 19.1 percent from 2004 through 2010, while the measure for the public sector rose just 13.6 percent” (p. 1). The difference in not only starting salary but also raises has been one of the leading causes local departments are losing personnel because officers are turning to the private sector for higher paying jobs and better benefits. Ayres (2008) stated that “Most law enforcement would agree that raising salaries and benefits would impact positively on retention of officers in the public sector, however the sliding economy and recession

make it almost impossible to compete with wages and benefits offered by private sector employers” (p. 1).

Advancement is another reason officers may desire to leave their department. Advancement is not only a way for officers to increase their salary but is also a great sense of accomplishment and a source of self-worth. Police officers are usually not the type of people that are sedentary, they like challenges and being a leader is a great challenge. Officers, especially those on the night shift, tend to be hired and then feel as if they have been forgotten. Some officers may perceive that they are brought on to the force, subjected to extensive training, and as soon as they are out on their own no one thinks of them unless they are in trouble or complained on. This perception causes several officers to feel as if they are not considered for special assignments or advancements within the department. Many officers that feel they are being overlooked will use the philosophy of ‘don’t rock the boat’ instead of voicing their grievances. This attitude can be detrimental to overall job satisfaction because as stated by McKeever & Kranda (2000) “officers need to be challenged and given opportunities for promotion and personal growth” (p. 1).

Even if it is not broken does not mean there is not room for improvement, and special projects are an excellent way to get officers out of their daily routine and allow those who feel overlooked a chance to feel as if they are part of something bigger and part of the team. By offering equal opportunities for special assignments to their officers, departments will encourage morale and retention by allowing the officer a chance to demonstrate if they are ready for advancement and allowing them to figure out if that is the type of advancement they are looking for. Law enforcement is always

evolving and if departments strive to keep officers involved in the changes by implementing special projects, creating new positions, promoting, and keeping everyone in the know they will keep officers excited to be a part of the department and prevent any chance they will become bored and move on.

One of the biggest problems causing low retention in law enforcement is that of departmental wide low morale. A study performed by Ericsson (1982) “showed that morale has to do with job satisfaction, which is often related to retention” (p. 1). Low morale can be attributed to many factors, only two of which have been previously mentioned in this article. Inadequate opportunity for advancement is capable of bringing down morale very quickly. Officers can feel cheated when they see another officer leave for a different agency and make more money all the while the officer who stayed and continued his due diligence at the original agency is denied pay increases while benefit costs go up. Many officers also become resentful towards the department and fellow coworkers because they feel ‘favorites’ are singled out for constant recognitions and are unfairly promoted. This preferential treatment will cause officers to feel as if they have unjustly been overlooked for an opportunity to advance, leading to poor morale. However, even if salaries are low and there is no advancement and a department works at keeping good morale throughout the department, an officer is more likely to stay. As Dwight D. Eisenhower so bluntly put it “the best morale exists when you never hear the word mentioned. When you hear a lot of talk about it, it’s usually lousy” (BrainyQuote, n.d.). It may be easy for officers to find more money and better advancement opportunities elsewhere, but it is extremely hard to find people you like to work for and with.

Morale starts with the leaders of departments and filters down. Officers want to believe in their supervisors, want a sense of leadership, and want to know they can be lead with confidence. Stainbrook (2004) stated “according to Department Chief Michael Hillmann of the Los Angeles Police Department’s Special Operations Bureau, “morale is the responsibility of the leadership and of the organization. The attitude and the demeanor of the organization’s leadership is a direct reflection of that organization’s morale” (p. 3). If leadership has a bad attitude towards the department or does not make employees feel good about themselves and the job they do, morale goes down everywhere. According to the California Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST) (2006), “people want to feel good about the work they do and the people they work for...they want to feel good about the organization, the culture, and receive recognition for their contribution” (p. 89).

Not only are officers leaving departments because of their leadership having bad attitudes, they are also leaving because there is a lack of leadership from their command staff and senior leaders. Orrick (2008) stated “senior police leaders are responsible for establishing the vision and direction of the agency and ensuring officers have sufficient resources to achieve these goals” (p.164). Law enforcement has often been compared to a militaristic organization, having supervisors that look for only the bad in the officer and not the good that he/she is doing, being quick to discipline while being slow to praise. Often the leadership within departments does not communicate effectively and rely too much on policy as a way of leading the troops, so to speak. According to Orrick (2008), the combination of “the use of an authoritative style of leadership, lack of two-way communication, and over reliance on police enforcement all

contribute to the degradation of the relationship with officers” (p. 164). Leaders must be able to communicate effectively with their officers and talk with them on the same level. Officers do not always have to agree with their command staff but they must be able to believe that their superiors will hold themselves accountable to the same standard if not higher.

More research suggested that officers are leaving their line of work due to little or no training and poor or inadequate equipment. Law enforcement is constantly changing and with that officers must be updated on all the laws they are bound to enforce, along with any departmental police changes. Departments cannot expect officers to perform their jobs well with very little in service training and the occasional off sight training they might receive. Orrick (2008) stated leadership should be viewing “training as an investment in officers and a prerequisite of a high-performing agency and being an employer of choice” (p. 163). Officers must not only be provided with all the latest technologies to able to perform their jobs, they must all be able to rely on that equipment, whether it be their patrol vehicle, computer, duty gear, or uniforms, to function properly in times of normal business and in times of dire emergencies. Having up to date, orderly, and working equipment not only gives the officers a sense of confidence and pride, but according to Orrick (2008), “more and more officers are considering equipment as part of their compensation package” (p. 163).

Another contributing factor to low retention is that of unmet or even unrealistic job expectations. While recruiting new officers many departments will often fill their heads with dreams of chasing and arresting the bad guy, getting involved in pursuits, going on exciting calls, and ridding the community of all criminals. By doing this hiring

departments are openly inviting the opportunity for employee disappointment because Orrick (2008) stated “when they were hired, officers thought they were joining a glamorous, exciting work environment” (p. 161). All too often reality sets in and even though these ambitions are admirable they are often unattainable leaving officers as Orrick (2008) stated “this job is not what I thought it was” (p. 162). Orrick (2008) further stated, “fueling low morale that is the result of a large ‘Say-Do Gap’” (p. 161). Due to this false illusion and the lack of proactive activity, officer’s morale becomes low and the officer looks for excitement by transferring to other assignments within the department. This can be at times helpful for the officer but most departments lack the opportunity of advancement due to their size.

With the changing of generations impacting the labor force by the “Baby Boomers now retiring and the majority of the workforce being generation Xers as leaders and Millennials as the workforce” (Parrott, 2010, p. 6), it’s important for leadership to shift their managerial style to achieve higher morale. Hacker (2011) stated, “Many employers would agree that both groups seem to be more motivated by personal fulfillment opportunities on the job than by traditional monetary rewards” (p. 1 para. 1). Motivation and reward are just one of many incentives leadership can implement to boost the morale of the younger generations. Parrott (2010) noted that boosting employee satisfaction can be as simple as positive reinforcements since “recognition from leadership is extremely important to keep up morale... [And] Millennials seek constant feedback” (Parrott, 2010, p. 6). However, motivation, positive feedback, and rewards should be given fairly.

It is evident through research and study that low retention has been an ongoing problem throughout departments for many years. Many situations can cause low morale in a department and not only does it affect the department as a whole, it also affects the entire family of each employee from that department. Church (2007) stated "The Las Vegas Metro Police Department's Lieutenant Hank said 'we don't just hire the officer, we hire the whole family'" (p. 1). Often employees will unintentionally carry their work dissatisfaction home with them, causing low job morale from a variety of issues to affect the officer's family unit as a whole. Based on research shown, one can see the need for departments to look at retention in a whole different light not only for the sake of the company but for also the sake of the officers and their families.

COUNTER POSITION

Some articles will refute the fact that low retention in law enforcement is not a problem. Axtman (2006) stated, "Police were once glamorized in the 1970s and 1980s with various shows that made police work hip and exciting... this started to decline with all the bad press in 1991 with the beating of Rodney King by the Los Angeles police officers" (p. 1). Retention began to become a problem because many perspective and active officers no longer wanted to be associated with a hated and disrespected career. Other articles will say that there is an abundance of officers looking for jobs and it is just as easy to rehire; however, one article by Axtman (2006) reported "that a shortage in recruits has the US scrambling to fill the ranks" (p. 1). There are plenty of articles instructing departments on how they can hire the right candidate to fill the ranks; however, if a department needs to be counseled on hiring the right people, then they

might look at the problems that exist within the department that may be causing officers to leave.

Some people will argue departments should simply use the community oriented policing service (COPS) program, which is a program that funds officers through government grants. However, the qualities of officers applying for these positions are far less superior to the officers that are already on the force that could be retained. The experienced officers know the community, citizens, departmental policies, and already have functional working relationships with fellow officers on their shifts. Retaining these experienced officers takes time and money. According to the California POST (2006), “an employee who has been on the job several years may have an annual salary of \$60,000 or more, plus benefits. Just considering the salary, the cost of replacing the individual could range from as low as \$15,000 to as high as \$120,000” (p. 85). Not only should overtime cost be considered when a new officer is in training, departments should also take into account that “the field training officer as well as the officer in training are out of commission and other officers are taking up the slack causing extra work load for others” (“California,” 2006, p.89). One cannot argue that this alone can cause tension and stress on the officers who are forced to work harder and longer attempted to pick up the slack. Many departments command staff have the attitude that if an officer leaves, someone else is ready to take their place. However, due to recent economic struggles many cities are not replacing officers that leave, hoping that by saving the salary the city will be able to save money compensating for the short falls in their budgets. This, in turn, can put more stress on officers because they have to do more work and now have even less staff and resources.

CONCLUSION

In summary, retention in law enforcement is a growing problem, and there is ample research that supports this. Evidence supports that lack of advancement, low salaries, and poor benefits can cause officers to seek other employment opportunities in either other police departments or in the private sector. Poor morale in a department can have a devastating effect on retention, and throughout this research paper there are several recommendations for departments that could aid them in retaining their valued officers. There are numerous benefits and reasons law enforcement agencies should work to develop programs of high retention with their department. Orrick (2008) stated “first, officers who work together for longer periods of time have more shared experiences and operate in a more cohesive manner” (p. 169). Department leaders want their officers to work in a positive and prideful manner, taking pride in not only their work but also their department.

Research showed that offering a mentoring program that places a veteran officer with a less experienced officer aided that officer in taking responsibility for molding his own career and helped the officer in making overall good decisions in the field. Orrick (2008) explained that “mentoring occurs at all levels of personal and professional development... Police agencies that have implanted the use of mentoring programs have found that they can have a positive impact on reducing the problems with recruitment, retention, and development of staff” (p. 200). With that being said, agencies have reduced their problems in an efficient way, by minimizing negative impact towards employees and senior staff. Not only can morale greatly benefit departments by building stronger morale amongst officers, it is also a great way departments can show initiative

while adhering to a strict low cost budget. Another advantage of a mentorship program is that senior officers have a chance to prepare and properly train lower level officers for future advancement opportunities, such as if other senior officers leaves. There are several mentoring programs available for departments to choose from such as peer mentoring, group mentoring, one-on-one mentoring, and a multiple mentoring program.

Departments can also offer incentives to retain experienced officers such as take home vehicles, rotation of assignments, and educational reimbursement. Another retention recommendation for departments to consider would involve a housing incentive such as the one offered by “the Mountain View (CA) Police Department [which] has dorm-like housing where employees can stay while off duty after their 12 hour shifts. They then go home on their 3-4 days off a week” (Church, 2007, para. 18). Even if a department is unable to budget the expense of setting up a dorm like setting for officers they can also “allow officer to park their travel trailer in the parking lot... It saves briefing time, gas, and has other benefits” (Church, 2007, para. 18). It is steps like these that departments can take to show their commitment to the happiness, safety, and wellbeing of their officers. Orrick (2008) stated, “Supervisors who treat their employees with respect, dignity, and concern for their welfare and development are more likely to retain officer than ones who do not treat their officers in this manner” (p.159). Overall officers want to work with leaders who care about them as a person, and as an employee.

All in all, most law enforcement agencies will have turnover, some good and some bad, but agencies must take every step they can to retain good officers if they are to survive and prosper in the future. Offering incentives or just making an officer feel

like he/she belongs and is part of a community will go a long way. Officers desire to have some say in their departments and long for recognition for their good deeds. Ultimately, officers desire to have a sense of accomplishment and worth, and to be acknowledged and praised by their leaders. A little bit, truly can go a long way.

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